

THE SALTSHAKER

A PUBLICATION OF COVENANT REFORMED PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH, ASHEVILLE, NORTH CAROLINA

Office: 828-253-6578—Email: office@covenantreformed.net—Website: www.covenantreformed.net

When Is My Child Ready for the Lord's Supper?

By Rev. Sean McCann

This is the final article in a series on the sacraments that I have been writing on and off for almost three years. As I have considered the meaning and practice of both Baptism and the Lord's Supper, one question still remains: when is a child ready to eat and drink the Lord's Supper? When we baptize our babies into the covenant community, it is with the express hope and prayer that they will one day believe the gospel themselves, make a public profession of faith, and so join the church as communicant members, entitled to all the rights and privileges of the church. The *what* of joining the church is fairly clear, however the *when* of joining can be a harder question to answer.

In Scriptural terms, a child is ready to come to the Lord's Table when he or she is able to "examine himself" and thereby "discern the body" (1 Cor 11:27-29). Or, as the Westminster Larger Catechism puts it, "The Lord's Supper is to be administered...only to such as are of years and ability to examine themselves" (Question 177). This self-examination is a process that should involve the child, parents, and church elders in order to wisely discern if the child shows evidence of a sincere belief in the Lord Jesus Christ, and rests on him alone for salvation. We do not set an age limit nor administer a standardized test to determine when the time is right. Rather we seek to prayerfully listen to each child and discern together if they are expressing an age-appropriate confession of faith. For thoughtful parents and elders, this is not an easy process. It should never be rushed, nor should it be unnecessarily delayed. We should not pressure our children, nor should we allow their souls to be neglected. As an aid to simplify the examination process, here are five questions for parents and elders to consider when determining a child's readiness to come to the Lord's Table.

1) Does my child have **knowledge** of the true God? We start here because knowledge is one of the easier elements to evaluate. Does the child have a basic understanding of the Trinity, the storyline of the Bible, mankind's sin and rebellion, the person and work of Jesus

Christ, the way of salvation, the meaning of the church, and the significance of the Lord's Supper? One of the central tasks before Christian parents (and churches) is to teach and instruct our children in the basics of our faith. This includes formal teaching, but we also must not neglect how much our children pick up by observing what we do, not just what we say. For better or worse, our experience of our heavenly Father's is often first communicated to us by the love – or lack thereof – of our earthly parents.

2) Does my child experience godly **guilt**?

We all experience guilt at some level in our lives, but godly guilt is something unique to the Christian. It involves judging our sin as God does and feeling the burden of his law to which we can never live up. It includes a conviction of our sin and misery, coupled with grief and hatred of our sin. Children (and adults too) often feel guilty for the negative effect their sin has on themselves and others, but not on God. So, they must be led to pray like David, "I know my transgression and my sin is ever before me. Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight" (Psalm 51:3-4). Fathers and mothers must take aim at their child's heart with patient and gentle discipline that does not provoke them but points them to see their sin and repent of it to God.

3) Does my child embrace Christ by **faith**?

Here is the crux of the examination: does the child have a true and sincere faith; does she believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and receive and rest upon Him alone for salvation as he is offered in the gospel? We are not looking for mere head knowledge, or guilty sorrow, or good works – for none of these things save. Our salvation is entirely the work of God, and it is freely offered to us in the gospel. If we embrace Jesus Christ by faith, then we have the promise and assurance that we are saved. This is why parents and pastors must always preach and explain the gospel, and why we must pray urgently for the Holy Spirit to open the hearts of our children to believe.

Morning Worship Service Indoors, Sundays at 10:00 am—Currently, in addition to our service in the Sanctuary, we have added a set-up in the Fellowship Hall, where a projector will simultaneously broadcast the service from the Sanctuary. Our pastors are preaching from the book of Genesis.

Livestream Worship Service, Sundays at 10:00 am and 6:00 pm—Morning and evening services are live streamed every week on our website and continue to be a source of encouragement for those who are not able to attend in person. We usually have 20-30 viewers of the livestream, and our experience setting this up has enabled us to help other sister churches do the same. The services are also posted on our YouTube channel every week.

Evening Worship Service, Sundays at 6:00 pm—Our pastors are preaching through the book of 1 Corinthians during these services. This service also meets in the Sanctuary, and is also broadcast in the Fellowship Hall.

Lord's Supper—We will celebrate the Lord's Supper at the morning services on the third Sunday of each month; May 16 and June 20 are our next two celebrations. We will also celebrate the Lord's Supper during the evening service on May 2.

Continued from Page 1

4) Does my child bear fruit in keeping with **repentance**? We can most often see godly guilt expressed when children show a readiness to repent. No one likes admitting they are wrong and saying they are sorry, so when it happens in our lives and those of our children we can recognize the work of the Holy Spirit. Children should be helped to see how they have hurt their parents, siblings, and friends, and be patiently led to ask their forgiveness. Their willingness to be reconciled with those they have hurt displays a deeper understanding of their own reconciliation with God. As we teach our children the path of repentance, we do well to help them on their way by modeling heart-felt repentance ourselves. Parents who know the forgiveness of God are freed to repent to their own children and seek their forgiveness. This modeling of humble faith can be used by God to break through to even the most calloused of souls.

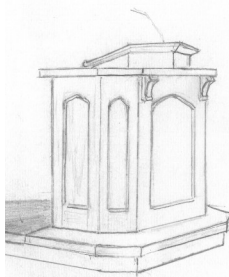
5) Does my child display personal **ownership** of the faith? Faith is a personal possession. We cannot believe for our children. They must in time make the faith their own. This is no small decision, but rather one of the most important ones they will ever make. Joining the church and coming to the Lord's Table is a weighty and solemn act, and we are right to caution our children not to follow Jesus without counting the costs. The early stages of a child's life involve mimicking their parents and believing everything they are told, but as they grow and develop, they learn to think and evaluate what they have been taught in order to come to their own conclusions. Parents and

elders must be careful to never coerce a child to join the church, but to encourage heart-felt ownership. This ownership of the faith might include an individual desire to read the Bible, pray, go to church, and take of the Lord's Supper. It might include a sincere repentance to God and others, a thoughtful obedience to God's law, and a bearing of the fruit of the Spirit. No two children are exactly alike, so in evaluating ownership we must do so generously with an understanding of a child's age, development, parentage, personality, and many other factors. Ultimately, we need to be satisfied that they understand – as much as they are able – what they are getting themselves into, and if they are doing so wholeheartedly.

Any parents out there overwhelmed yet or is it just me!? Writing this all down convicts me of my failings as a father and an elder – who is sufficient for these things? With that in mind, I close with a call to pray. Church members, pray for our young parents. Pray that God would give them the strength, humility, wisdom, and grace for the task before them. Pray for our elders to hold forth Christ and his gospel for our children to see and believe, pray for wisdom and discernment to disciple our covenant children and to come alongside our parents. Pray for our church to join in this task together. We thank God for the children he has brought into our midst, so pray that we would live up to this sacred trust to protect our children and nurture their faith. And finally, pray for our children, and ask God to honor the promises he made at baptism, to be a God to us and to our children.

The Sacred Desk

By Rev. Sean McCann



Recently, we entered into a new section in our morning sermon series through the book of Genesis. The first eleven chapters cover the major events of primeval history and follow the seed of the woman from Adam through Noah and down to Abraham. Staring in chapter twelve, Genesis focuses on the patriarchs of the faith: Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, culminating in Jacob's twelve sons. This patriarchal history continues to focus on how God makes and fulfills promises to his people.

Hebrews 11 famously calls us to look to the saints of old and consider the faith of those who have gone before us. Chief on the list of Old Testament saints is Abraham, the man of faith. We are to look to Abraham as an example, but what exactly is he an example of? The first story we read from Abraham's life is when he lies about Sarai not being his wife (12:10-20) – is this our example?! Does Abraham teach us the principles of a righteous life before the face of God? Not really. Though his life does contain some worthy examples, it is also filled with sin that is passed down for generations to come! One of the themes of the rest of the book of Genesis is how the failures of Abraham and his sons put the promises of God in jeopardy, but how God in his faithfulness rescues them every time.

Abraham is not called the man of faithfulness, but rather the man of faith. He is remembered and celebrated throughout the Scriptures for his simple faith in the promises of God: "Abraham believed, and it was counted to him as righteousness." Abraham believed God, but struggled to live out that faith through the trails and hardships of life – does that sound like you? He is called out of his home country, given promises so wonderful that they hardly seem believable, and then set on his way to wait for God to fulfill his promises. Abraham struggles to believe, succumbs to fear of man, sinfully takes matters into his own hands, and grows old waiting for God to fulfill his promises. Again, does this sound like you? How do we endure the hardships of life? How do we press on despite our own failures? How can we call ourselves followers of God when our good works are just as pitiful as those of Abraham? The answer: we believe in the promises of God. You see, despite how bad it got for Abraham, he always believed, and that is a path we can learn to follow. That is what the rest of Genesis is all about, so join me as we walk by faith, following Abraham, the man of faith.

Preaching Schedule

Date	Morning	Evening
May 2	Gen. 11:27-12:9	1 Cor. 6:12-20
May 9	Gen. 12:10-20	1 Cor. 7:1-7
May 16	Gen. 13	1 Cor. 7:8-16
May 23	Gen. 14	1 Cor. 7:17-24
May 30	Gen. 15	1 Cor. 7:25-40
June 6	Gen. 16	1 Cor. 8:1-13
June 13	Gen. 17:1-14	1 Cor. 9:1-18
June 20	Gen. 17:15-18:21	1 Cor. 9:19-27
June 27	Gen. 18:22-33	1 Cor. 10:1-13

Biblical Compassion

By Rev. Chris Brown

Biblical compassion is an attitude and choice that a Christian does in the context of a fallen world. Because the world is fallen, there are people who are hurt, and need our compassion. Because the world is fallen, there are people who will be angered by our faith, and they too need our compassion. One example of this is in my first interaction with one of my neighbors. When he found out that I am a Christian he said, "Oh, you're a Christian? Well, didn't you know Constantine re-wrote the whole Bible, and that Jesus got married, and all of his disciples and children moved to Europe?" With a few simple words, I could have ended any future interaction. But I believe Scripture teaches that biblical compassion is three things: something to prepare for, a response of truth to lies, as well a response of pity and patience to hatred. Each of these concepts need to be wedded together if we are to show true, biblical compassion to a lost and dying world. Let's look at some passages of Scripture to prove this point.

We need to prepare to be compassionate because people will hate us or the God we serve. In 1 John 3:13, the apostle John says, "Do not be surprised, brothers, that the world hates you." But we aren't told simply to expect hatred. We are told to love those who hate us and who hate our God. Jesus commands us, "Love your enemies" (Matthew 5:44).

One way to love the enemies of God and of His people is to confront lies with the truth. It is unloving to leave a person in ignorance, or to allow them to spew lies that can be addressed kindly and publicly. Paul says, "We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ" (2 Cor. 10:5). Similarly, the apostle Peter tells us, "In your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you" (1 Peter 3:15a).

But another way to show compassion to those who hate us is simply to pity the state of their heart, and so be patient with them. Peter adds a note that when we give a reason for our hope, "Yet do it with gentleness and respect" (1 Peter 3:15b). Our witness to the reality of Christ's resurrection, and of the hope of salvation, is tragically injured when we respond to animosity with a vengeful tirade. In fact, in 1 Peter 2:15, Peter says that the main way we silence foolish people is simply by "doing good." Biblical compassion is a hard thing, but a blessed thing. When we show kindness to those who hate us, and soundly and gently respond to their arguments with love, we imitate the example of our Savior. Christ lovingly challenged our hard hearts with His truth. Let us strive to do the same towards others!

Christians Get Depressed Too

by Rev. Chris Brown



We've endured a difficult season in the life of our nation, our families, and our Church. Not surprisingly, then, some recent studies suggest that rates of depression have increased exponentially during the last year or so. Indeed, I myself have struggled with some form of depression for the last nineteen years, and found that during this season of life it has been exacerbated. It was with this in mind that I picked up David Murray's little book *Christians Get Depressed Too* in hope of some wise council. And some wise council it is!

If you've ever wondered, "What's the deal with that person? Why are they so glum and Eeyore-like? How can I understand them and interact with them?" Then this is a helpful starting place for you. Even if you have some years of experience dealing with depression or with a depressed friend or family member, this short book is helpful in shaping our views of depression in a compassionate and biblical way.

Murray treats the topic of depression with six C's: crisis, complexity, condition, causes, cures, and caregivers. I just want to examine his first point about how depression is a crisis. Murray points out that the Bible speaks to depression. While it does not use the term "depression," the concept itself is clearly articulated in multiple passages, and numerous biblical characters appear to bear its symptoms (think Moses, Hannah, Jeremiah, Elijah, Job, Psalmists). A fellow pastor who has suffered from depression comments, "The Psalms treat depression more realistically than many of today's popular books on Christianity and psychology."

Not only is depression a biblical idea, depression is extremely common today. Murray cites current statistics which say that one in five people experience depression, and one in ten experience a panic attack at some stage in life. It also can be prevented or mitigated if it is understood and approached appropriately! If depression is identified, and its source is understood, we can help someone walk through it, or even help them learn methods that may alleviate it. To be a useful friend to the depressed person, we need to know what is actually helpful, and what sort of counsel is actually damaging. As one little workbook says, "Being a depressed Christian in a church full of people who do not understand depression is like a little taste of hell." Instead, we can learn how to walk beside those in a dark trial like depression in a helpful way.

Aside from all of these reasons for reading the book, I want to end with the point that Murray makes in his first chapter, that depression is actually a talent to be invested for God. William Bridges argues similarly in his book *A Lifting up for the Downcast*, when he says, "Afflictions...are part of Christ's purchase for you." As we try to help others, or help ourselves, walk along and out of the road of depression, this little book by David Murray can be a helpful guide to us.